

STEAMER WYNOKA.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

TRANSMITTING,

WITH A LETTER FROM THE CHIEF OF ENGINEERS, RECOMMENDATIONS IN RELATION TO CLAIMS ARISING FROM BURNING OF STEAMER WYNOKA.

FEBRUARY 7, 1902.— Referred to the Committee on Claims and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, February 4, 1902.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit herewith, together with other papers, a letter from the Chief of Engineers, U. S. A., dated January 29th ultimo, submitting a statement concerning the loss of personal property belonging to certain employees of the United States, caused by the burning of the steamboat *Wynoka*, at O'Donnells, Arkansas, Mississippi River, on October 15, 1901.

It appears from these papers that after an exhaustive inquiry the origin of the fire could not be placed; also that it was impossible to fix the responsibility for the same. The individual members of the crew have made affidavits as to the loss sustained by them, and regarding this the Chief of Engineers remarks as follows:

It is believed that the detailed amounts set forth in each affidavit are reasonable and that the articles which are alleged to have been lost were such as would usually be in the possession of employees who were compelled by reason of their duties to make the steamer their home, and it would seem proper that they should be reimbursed for their losses, which they could not prevent and which occurred while in the performance of their duties.

In accordance with the views of the Chief of Engineers it is recommended that an item be inserted in the next general deficiency bill reimbursing these employees in the amounts claimed.

Very respectfully,

ELIHU ROOT,
Secretary of War.

The SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF ENGINEERS,
UNITED STATES ARMY,
Washington, January 29, 1902.

SIR: 1. I have the honor to submit herewith certain facts pertaining to the destruction by fire of personal property belonging to certain employees of the United States, with recommendation, as will be noted below, as to reimbursing the said employees for the loss sustained by them.

2. On the night of October 15, 1901, the steamboat *Wynoka*, in use with the dredging fleet of the Mississippi River Commission, was burned at O'Donnells, Ark., opposite Island No. 26, the crew escaping from the vessel, but losing their effects, there not being time to save them.

3. Investigations were made by Captain Howell, the secretary of the Commission, and by a committee appointed by the Commission, consisting of Lieut. Cols. Thomas H. Handbury and H. M. Adams. The results of the investigations referred to will be found in detail in the accompanying report of Captain Howell and the printed extract from the proceedings of the Mississippi River Commission, from which it appears that after an exhaustive inquiry the origin of the fire could not be placed, and it was impossible to fix the responsibility for the fire upon anyone.

4. The individual members of the crew have made affidavits, which are also inclosed, as to the loss sustained by them. Their names, duties, and amounts of loss are as follows:

C. W. Sturtevant, assistant engineer.....	\$213.50
Rolla Brown, steward.....	17.25
Alice Brown, laundress.....	72.75
M. L. Kelly, master.....	44.00
Robert G. Duffy, waiter.....	6.75
Fread Gehring, cook.....	9.65
T. H. Ross, mate.....	246.00
L. C. Partee, engineer.....	45.50

5. It is believed that the detailed amounts set forth in each affidavit are reasonable, and that the articles which are alleged to have been lost were such as would usually be in the possession of employees who were compelled by reason of their duties to make the steamer their home, and it would seem proper that they should be reimbursed for their losses, which they could not prevent and which occurred while in the performance of their duties.

6. I have, therefore, the honor to recommend that Congress be asked to insert the following item in the general deficiency bill:

Reimbursement to C. W. Sturtevant, Rolla Brown, Alice Brown, M. L. Kelly, Robert G. Duffy, Fread Gehring, T. H. Ross, and L. C. Partee: That the Secretary of the Treasury be, and he is hereby, authorized and directed to pay, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, to C. W. Sturtevant, two hundred and thirteen dollars and fifty cents; to Rolla Brown, seventeen dollars and twenty-five cents; to Alice Brown, seventy-two dollars and seventy-five cents; to M. L. Kelly, forty-four dollars; to Robert G. Duffy, six dollars and seventy-five cents; to Fread Gehring, nine dollars and sixty-five cents; to T. H. Ross, two hundred and forty-six dollars; and to L. C. Partee, forty-five dollars and fifty cents as a reimbursement to the aforesaid Sturtevant, Rolla Brown, Alice Brown, Kelly, Duffy, Gehring, Ross, and Partee, for the loss of personal property sustained by them while in the service of the United States and acting as the crew of the steamer *Wynoka* belonging to the Mississippi River Commission, the aforesaid steamer having been destroyed by fire on the night of October 15, 1901, through no negligence or fault of the above-named

employees. The above-named appropriation shall be in full for all claims against the United States Government.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

G. L. GILLESPIE,

Brig. Gen., Chief of Engineers, U. S. Army.

Hon. ELIHU ROOT,
Secretary of War.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION,
St. Louis, Mo., October 21, 1901.

COLONEL: I have the honor to report that the entire cabin of the tender *Wynoka* was entirely consumed by fire on the night of October 15, 1901.

The *Wynoka* was acting as tender to the dredge *Zeta*, which had just completed dredging at O'Donnells Crossing, at 6.30 o'clock that evening, and the dredging plant had been swung to starboard out of the dredged area and tied up for the night. At 9 p. m. an alarm of fire was heard from the *Wynoka*, which was lying at the right bank, immediately above O'Donnell's light. When first seen, within a minute of alarm, the entire forward part of cabin was in a blaze, and within twenty minutes the entire cabin was enveloped in flames and completely demolished.

The tender was lying alongside of two loaded coal barges abreast, with an empty coal barge below the two. The head lines holding the *Wynoka* and the outer loaded barge were burned through and both hulls went adrift. Later on the empty barge was also torn from its moorings and went adrift.

The small towboat *H. M. Graham*, belonging to the First and Second districts, was lying about 2 miles below, where some repair work was being done to the bank revetment in that vicinity. The *Graham* was signaled, and as soon as steam could be raised came to the rescue. It succeeded in landing the two coal barges and in putting out the fire which had started in the coal and around the gunwales. This done, the hull of the *Wynoka*, which had passed on downstream, was landed in an eddy just above the foot of Island No. 26 and tied up. At that time the upper works were completely consumed and the only fire remaining was in the pile of coal which was on the boat. The pump of the *Graham* having broken down, this could not be put out.

On the following morning at 7 o'clock the *Graham* took the pile sinker in tow and departed for the wreck of the *Wynoka*. The pile-sinker pump was used in extinguishing the fire in the pile of coal on the *Wynoka's* hull before any apparent damage to the deck had resulted from the heat.

The *Nokomis*, with a tow of coal, passed down at 10.30 a. m. She was hailed, tied up her tow, and was employed between 12 m. and 4.15 p. m. in assembling the hulls that had gone adrift, on the right bank above O'Donnell's light, and in towing the dredging plant over to the same point, where all pieces could be properly cared for.

The origin of the fire is not known. The mate of the *Wynoka* knows that the striker on watch was in the boiler room running the feed pump about twenty minutes before the alarm of fire was given.

The striker had made his rounds ten minutes before the fire was discovered and had not detected any sign of fire or smoke. It is the general opinion that the tender caught forward of the boilers, just under the boiler deck.

All of the crew were asleep, and several had narrow escapes. They escaped by going down the back stairway, losing most of their clothes. The engineer, Mr. L. C. Partee, was somewhat burned about the face, but not seriously. The mate, Mr. T. H. Ross, lost his gold watch and \$50 in cash. Mr. Sturtevant lost all of his personal effects and books, which were stored on the boat, as that was the tender used for an office boat during the lay-up period.

Mr. Sturtevant reports that he has made a hasty examination and finds that apparently the boilers, main engines, wheel, and hull are not much damaged. The crew of the *Zeta* are engaged in cleaning up the machinery and repairing same so that it will not further rust.

The tender *Sachem* is acting as tender to both the *Zeta* and the *Beta*, which is now tied up at the foot of Island No. 34.

The *Wynoka* was a steel-hull steam tender, built under contract with the Iowa Iron Works Company, Dubuque, Iowa, for the sum of \$45,672. It was received at West Memphis, Ark., December 4, 1899.

As a detailed examination of the hull and machinery has not yet been made, it is impracticable to give an estimate of the necessary repairs, but it is thought that \$6,000 will cover the cost of the deck houses and cabins and, if the hull and machinery are not badly damaged, that the entire cost of repairs will be under \$10,000.

With respect to the loss of the personal effects of employees on the boat, I have the honor to invite your attention to Document No. 381, House of Representatives, Fifty-sixth Congress, second session, in which the Secretary of War transmits, under date of January 29, 1901, a letter from the Chief of Engineers U. S. A., concerning loss of personal property belonging to United States inspectors on a dredge working in Tampa Bay. This dredge was burned to the water's edge on August 4, 1900, and the inspectors lost their personal effects. The Secretary of War, in transmitting the letter of the Chief of Engineers U. S. A. to the House of Representatives, concurred in the views of the Chief of Engineers U. S. A. that an item should be inserted in the general deficiency bill for reimbursement of the amounts claimed. I have the honor to recommend, therefore, that I be authorized to ascertain the loss occasioned by the destruction of the *Wynoka* and submit the claims to the Chief of Engineers U. S. A., recommending request for their reimbursement.

Very respectfully,

G. P. HOWELL,
Captain, Corps of Engineers.

Col. AMOS STICKNEY,
Corps of Engineers, U. S. A.,
President Mississippi River Commission, St. Louis, Mo.

STATE OF TENNESSEE,
Shelby County, City of Memphis:

Personally appeared before me, W. T. Avery, a notary public in and for said State and county at Memphis, Tenn., duly commissioned and qualified, C. W. Sturtevant, who, being duly sworn, states that he was employed as assistant engineer and while serving as such on the United States dredge fleet under the Mississippi River Commission was acting as superintendent of dredging operations, having all personal property on board the U. S. S. *Wynoka*, which was used as the general office during the idle period of the fleet and was his home.

When field operations commenced a few clothes were transferred to the small inspection boat *Search* and that while absent from the *Wynoka* on the *Search*, performing the duties of superintendent, the *Wynoka* was totally destroyed by fire at 9 p. m. on October 15, 1901, on the Mississippi River at O'Donnells Landing, Arkansas, and that his personal property was destroyed by the fire, the crew barely escaping with their lives. He states that the cause of the fire is unknown and not believed to be due to carelessness nor failure in attention to duties on the part of himself or any member of the crew. The following articles of personal property could not be saved and the same were destroyed in the fire, and that the following valuations given for the several articles are believed to be just and reasonable.

1 trunk, military	\$5.00
1 trunk, common	3.50
1 trunk, common	2.50
1 suit of clothes	10.00
1 suit of clothes	12.00
1 revolver belt and holster	1.00
1 4 by 5 inch Eastman kodak	7.50
4 large photographs of dredges, at 50 cents	2.00
24 large photographs of boats, at 25 cents	6.00
800 small photographs of engineer work and Cuban views, at 3 cents	24.00
2 pine chests, \$3 each	6.00
10 book boxes, unit cases, at \$2.50 each	25.00
1 picture frame	2.50
1 volume Dubois on Bridges	7.00
1 Wentworth's Trigonometry .....	.75
1 logarithmic tables, 5-place .....	.50
1 calculus .....	.75
1 geometry .....	.50
1 astronomy	1.50
1 surveying, Gillespie	1.50
1 higher surveying	1.00
1 Rankin's Mechanics	2.00
1 Carpenter's Experimental Engineering	2.00
1 Thurston on Boilers	2.00
1 Roper's Handbook on Engines	1.00
1 set Encyclopædia Britannica	42.50
1 set Encyclopædia, Chambers' (old)	17.50
1 Water Supply Filtration .....	.75
1 Thompson on Electricity .....	.75
1 Merriman's Hydraulics	2.00
1 Merriman's Method Least Squares	1.00
1 Forney's Catechism of the Locomotive	2.00
2 Army blankets, \$2.00 each	4.00
1 Complete file of Engineering News, 1895 to 1900, inclusive	12.00
1 Slide rule	3.50
Total	213.50

C. W. STURTEVANT,
Assistant Engineer.

Witness my hand and notarial seal at Memphis aforesaid this 27th day of December, 1901.

[SEAL.]

(My commission expires October 10, 1905.)

W. T. AVERY, Notary Public.

STATE OF TENNESSEE,

Shelby County, City of Memphis, Notary's Office.

Personally appeared before me, W. T. Avery, a notary public in and for said State and county, at Memphis, Tenn., duly commissioned and qualified, Rolla Brown, who, being duly sworn, states that he was employed as steward and stenographer, and while serving as such on the United States dredge fleet under the Mississippi River Commission was acting as steward and stenographer, having all personal property on board the U. S. S. *Wynoka*, which was used as the general office during the idle period of the fleet and was his home.

When field operations commenced, a few clothes were transferred to the small inspection boat *Search*, and that while absent from the *Wynoka* on the *Search*, per-

forming the duties of steward and stenographer, the *Wynoka* was totally destroyed by fire, at 9 p. m. on October 15, 1901, on the Mississippi River, at O'Donnells Landing, Ark., and that his personal property was destroyed by the fire, the crew barely escaping with their lives. He states that the cause of the fire is unknown, and not believed to be due to carelessness nor failure in attention to duties on the part of any member of the crew. The following articles of personal property could not be saved, and the same were destroyed in the fire, and that the following valuations given for the several articles are believed to be just and reasonable:

1 trunk, common.....	\$2. 50
1 suit of clothes	10. 00
1 Remsen's Chemistry	1. 00
1 Standard Phonographic Reader.....	. 75
1 German dictionary.....	2. 00
1 Qualitative Analysis	1. 00
Total.....	17. 25

ROLLA BROWN, *Steward.*

Witness my hand and notarial seal at Memphis aforesaid this 27th day of December, 1901.

[SEAL.]

W. T. AVERY, *Notary Public.*

(My commission expires October 10, 1905.)

STATE OF TENNESSEE,

County of Shelby, City of Memphis, Notary's Office:

Personally appeared before me, W. T. Avery, a notary public in and for said State and county at Memphis, duly commissioned and qualified, Alice Brown, who, being duly sworn, states that she was employed as laundress, and while serving as such on the U. S. S. *Wynoka* the steamer *Wynoka* was totally destroyed by fire at 9 p. m. on 15th October, 1901, on the Mississippi River at O'Donnells Landing, Ark., and that her personal property was destroyed by the fire. She states that the cause of the fire is unknown and not believed to be due to carelessness nor failure of attention to duty on the part of any member of the crew. The following articles of her personal property could not be saved and the same were destroyed in the fire, and that the following valuations given for the several articles are believed to be just and reasonable:

Money	\$8. 00
1 trunk.....	3. 00
1 pair gold spectacles.....	5. 00
1 pair silver spectacles.....	2. 00
1 bible	2. 00
1 dress and waist, complete	10. 00
1 skirt, new.....	8. 00
1 pair shoes, new	2. 50
1 pair shoes, low quarter.....	1. 50
1 silk waist	4. 00
1 flannel waist	2. 00
3 winter underclothes	4. 50
4 winter nightgowns.....	3. 00
5 chemise.....	4. 00
2 summer nightgowns	1. 00
4 pair stockings	1. 00
4 summer dresses.....	4. 00
1 white waist	1. 00
1 white waist .....	. 75
1 white waist .....	. 50
4 calico waists	3. 00
1 hat	1. 00
1 pair kid gloves	1. 00
Total.....	72. 75

ALICE (her x mark) BROWN,
Laundress.

Witnesses:

W. T. AVERY,
I. R. POSTAL.

Witness my hand and notarial seal at Memphis, aforesaid, this 31st day of December, 1901.

[SEAL.]

W. T. AVERY,
Notary Public.

(My commission expires October 10, 1905.)

STATE OF MISSOURI, *City of St. Louis, Notary's Office:*

Personally appeared before me, Annie K. Swebel, a notary public in and for said State and city, duly commissioned and qualified, M. L. Kelly, who, being duly sworn, states that he was employed as master, and while serving as such on the U. S. S. *Wynoka* the steamer *Wynoka* was totally destroyed by fire at 9 p. m. on October 15, 1901, on the Mississippi River at O'Donnell's Landing, Arkansas, and that his personal property was destroyed by the fire. He states that the cause of the fire is unknown and not believed to be due to carelessness nor failure of attention to duty on the part of any member of the crew. The following articles of his personal property could not be saved and the same were destroyed in the fire, and that the following valuations given for the several articles are believed to be just and reasonable:

1 coat and vest	\$5. 00
1 coat, light	3. 00
1 pair pants	4. 00
2 suits winter underwear	6. 00
1 suit summer underwear	1. 50
1 pair shoes	3. 50
6 new shirts	6. 00
4 shirts, common	1. 00
1 telescope	1. 00
1 lower set false teeth	12. 00
1 hand valise	1. 00
Total	44. 00

M. L. KELLY, Master.

Witness my hand and notarial seal at the place aforesaid this 31st day of December, 1901.

[SEAL.]

ANNIE K. SWEBEL, Notary Public.

(My term expires February 15, 1904.)

Personally appeared before me, C. C. Hosford, a notary public in and for said State and county at Empire, Ga., duly commissioned and qualified, Robert G. Duffy, who, being duly sworn, states that he was employed as waiter, and while serving as such on the U. S. S. *Wynoka* the steamer *Wynoka* was totally destroyed by fire at 9 p. m. on October 15, 1901, on the Mississippi River at O'Donnell's Landing, Arkansas, and that his personal property was destroyed by the fire. He states that the cause of the fire is unknown and not believed to be due to carelessness nor failure of attention to duty on the part of any member of the crew. The following articles of his personal property could not be saved and the same were destroyed in the fire, and that the following valuations given for the several articles are believed to be just and reasonable:

1 suit winter underwear	\$1. 00
1 pair shoes, new	3. 00
2 shirts .....	. 75
1 pair pants	2. 00
Total	6. 75

ROBERT G. DUFFY, Waiter.

Witness my hand and notarial seal at Empire, Ga., aforesaid this 31st day of December, 1901.

[SEAL.]

C. C. HOSFORD, Notary Public.

STATE OF MISSOURI, *City of St. Louis, Notary's Office:*

Personally appeared before me, Annie K. Swebel, a notary public in and for said State and city, at St. Louis, Mo., duly commissioned and qualified, Fread Gehring, who, being duly sworn, states that he was employed as cook, and while serving as such on the U. S. S. *Wynoka* the steamer *Wynoka* was totally destroyed by fire at 9 p. m. on 15th October, 1901, on the Mississippi River, at O'Donnells Landing, Ark., and that his personal property was destroyed by the fire. He states that the cause of the fire is unknown and not believed to be due to carelessness nor failure of attention to duty on the part of any member of the crew. The following articles of his personal property could not be saved, and the same were destroyed in the fire, and that the following valuations given for the several articles are believed to be just and reasonable:

3 white shirts	\$1.50
1 heavy woolen shirt	1.00
2 white jackets	1.00
1 pair pants	2.50
2 butcher knives .....	.80
1 vegetable knife .....	.35
1 razor	1.50
1 pair spectacles	1.00
Total	9.65

FREAD GEHRING, *Cook.*

Witness my hand and notarial seal at the place aforesaid this 31st day of December, 1901.

[SEAL.]

ANNIE K. SWEBEL, *Notary Public.*

STATE OF LOUISIANA,

Parish of Orleans, City of New Orleans, Notary's Office:

Personally appeared before me, Theodore G. Spitzfaden, a notary public in and for said State and parish, at city of New Orleans, duly commissioned and qualified, T. H. Ross, who, being duly sworn, states that he was employed as mate, and while serving as such on the U. S. S. *Wynoka* the steamer *Wynoka* was totally destroyed by fire at 9 p. m. on 15th October, 1901, on the Mississippi River, at O'Donnells Landing, Ark., and that his personal property was destroyed by the fire. He states that the cause of the fire is unknown and not believed to be due to carelessness nor failure of attention to duty on the part of any member of the crew. The following articles of his personal property could not be saved, and the same were destroyed in the fire, and that the following valuations given for the several articles are believed to be just and reasonable:

1 gold watch	\$150.00
Cash (currency and silver)	48.00
1 shirt set (gold sleeve and collar buttons)	16.00
1 suit of clothes	12.00
1 set of safety razors	8.00
4 suits of underwear, at \$3 per suit	12.00
Total	246.00

T. H. ROSS, *Mate.*

Witness my hand and notarial seal at city of New Orleans aforesaid this 2d day of January, 1901.

[SEAL.]

THEO. G. SPITZFADEN, *Notary Public.*

STATE OF TENNESSEE,

County of Shelby, City of Memphis:

Personally appeared before me, John Colbert, a notary public in and for said State and county at Memphis, duly commissioned and qualified, L. C. Partee, who, being duly sworn, states that he was employed as engineer, and while serving as such on the U. S. S. *Wynoka* the steamer *Wynoka* was totally destroyed by fire at 9 p. m. on October 15, 1901, on the Mississippi River at O'Donnell's Landing, Ark., and that

his personal property was destroyed by the fire. He states that the cause of the fire is unknown and not believed to be due to carelessness nor failure of attention to duty on the part of any member of the crew. The following articles of his personal property could not be saved and the same were destroyed in the fire, and that the following valuations given for the several articles are believed to be just and reasonable:

1 suit of clothes	\$20.00
2 shirts, at \$1	2.00
2 suits of underclothes, at \$2.50	5.00
6 gold shirt buttons, at \$1	6.00
1 pair of shoes	4.00
1 hat	4.00
2 suits overalls and jackets, at \$1	2.00
1 umbrella	2.50

Total 45.50

L. C. PARTEE, *Engineer.*

Witness my hand and notarial seal at Memphis aforesaid this 7th day of January, 1902.

[SEAL.]

JNO. COLBERT, *Notary Public.*

(Commission expires July 31, 1903.)

PROCEEDINGS OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION.

[Eighty-fourth session.]

ON BOARD U. S. S. MISSISSIPPI.

[Extract.]

* * * * *
NOVEMBER 8, 1901.

* * * * *

Lieutenant-Colonel Handbury offered the following resolution regarding the burning of the steamer *Wynoka*:

"That a committee of two members of the Commission be appointed by the President to investigate and report upon the matter of the burning of the steamer *Wynoka*, the committee to report all obtainable facts connected therewith and fix the responsibility for the burning of this vessel, if possible. It will also ascertain the character and value of the personal property of the employees destroyed, and will submit an estimate of the cost of the repairs that will be necessary to put this vessel in good serviceable condition again. Carried.

The President then appointed as members of this committee Lieutenant-Colonel Handbury and Lieutenant-Colonel Adams.

* * * * *
NOVEMBER 15, 1901.

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The meeting was resumed at 11 a. m., and the special committee appointed by resolution of the Commission (p. 732, proceedings this session) to investigate the burning of the tender *Wynoka*, submitted the following report:

U. S. S. MISSISSIPPI, *November 15, 1901.*

COLONEL: Your special committee, appointed under resolution of the Commission November 8, 1901, to investigate and report all facts obtainable concerning the burning of the steamer *Wynoka*, having made the investigation required, have the honor to submit the following report:

We find that on October 15, 1901, this boat was acting as tender to the dredge *Zeta*, working at O'Donnells Crossing, about 150 miles below Cairo. The dredging was completed on the evening of that day and the *Wynoka* was tied up to the bank for the night. About 9 p. m., when all the crew except the watchman had retired, a fire was discovered near the stairway at the forward end of the boat just forward of

the boilers. This was discovered by the watchman, who immediately gave the alarm, and the crew escaped. Some who were sleeping forward of the cross bulkhead of the cabin barely escaped without injury, while those in the after part of the boat were not so closely pressed. The entire cabin and woodwork of the boat was destroyed and the machinery damaged to a considerable extent. The hull, being of steel, was not materially injured. Some personal effects belonging to the crew and to the assistant engineer, superintending the dredge operations, were also destroyed.

The boat was received new from the hands of the contractor December 4, 1899, at a cost of \$45,672.

It has been estimated that it will cost about \$15,795 to put the boat in a good state of repair, ready for service again.

With regard to the origin of the fire, nothing definite could be ascertained. All the evidence goes to show that it was first discovered in the forward end of the boat near the stairway, and before anything could be done to extinguish it, even to starting the fire pump and turning the water upon it from the hose, it had made such progress that it was beyond control.

One theory suggested as the probable origin was that pieces of cotton waste saturated with oil may have been left upon the steam drum, which rises to within a foot or 18 inches of the boiler deck, and that they may have become ignited by the heat. The carlins of this boat being of pitch pine, would instantly take fire. These steam domes being aft of cross bulkhead in the cabin, the theory, in default of direct evidence to sustain it, does not account for the fire first breaking out near the stairs at the forward end of the boat.

Another theory suggested is that the fire may have had its origin in a short circuit or overheated electric wires. There were electric wires on the stairway bulkheads, supplying lights on the forward part of the boat, but so far as could be ascertained these were in perfect condition. The dynamo engine on board the boat had not been stopped for the night when the fire was discovered. It appears to have been a custom on board this boat to put out these lights at 9 o'clock when the boat was not running. There was no definite information obtained to substantiate this theory.

It has also been suggested that the boat may have been intentionally set on fire by some dissatisfied or ill-disposed member of the crew, but no evidence of this was discovered.

The captain of the boat, the engineer, the mate, the cook, and the waiter boy, all of whom were on board at the time of the fire, were interrogated, and their evidence is submitted herewith. It was impracticable to obtain a statement from the watchman, who first discovered the fire, as he had since that event left the Government service and is employed upon one of the large packet boats.

Having exhausted all sources from which evidence upon this point could be obtained, the committee feel obliged to report that the origin of the fire is unknown and that it is unable to fix the responsibility for it upon anyone.

Regarding the personal property lost by persons in Government employ by the fire, it appears that the secretary of the Commission is investigating this subject and having lists of this made out and sworn to by the parties interested. In due time these affidavits will be completed and laid before the President. Knowing this, the committee did not make further investigation along these lines.

Respectfully submitted.

THOS. H. HANDBURY,
Lieutenant-Colonel, Corps of Engineers, U. S. A.,
H. M. ADAMS,
Lieutenant-Colonel, Corps of Engineers, U. S. A.,
Special Committee.

* * * * *
G. P. HOWELL,
Captain, Corps of Engineers, U. S. A., Secretary Mississippi River Commission.

I certify that the above is a true extract from the minutes of the seventy-fourth session of the Mississippi River Commission.

G. P. HOWELL,
Captain, Corps of Engineers, U. S. A., Secretary Mississippi River Commission.
Col. AMOS STICKNEY,
Corps of Engineers, U. S. A., President Mississippi River Commission.